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The Christian News-Letter

No. 192

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

October 6th, 1943

DEAR MEMBER,

What was said in the last News-Letter about the improved relations between the Soviet Government and the Orthodox Church in Russia needs to be amplified in one or two directions in order to complete the picture.

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT

I ought first of all to note that Canon Widdrington, who has followed the religious situation in Russia very closely, thinks that I depicted the state of things existing previously to the recent moves in too sombre colours. "I have a hunch," he writes, "that the restrictions imposed by the legislation of 1928 are no longer operating, and that the Orthodox Church and the sects are enjoying a very large measure of liberty. I have an idea that the Archbishop of York will bring back information to confirm this view. Stalin can scarcely be expected at this moment to annul the objectionable legislation, although I am hopeful that this may be done after the war, and that the provision for the training of the ministry may be restored. Indeed, if we learn when the Archbishop returns that some seminaries are open, I shall not be surprised."

The Archbishop of York is reported in the press to have expressed the view that full religious freedom now exists in Russia. He is also reported as stating that at the Church services he had attended he had been impressed by the fact that the majority of the congregation were under forty-five.

No one will suppose that a Government publicly committed to atheism was prompted to adopt a more favourable attitude to religion by the personal religious sympathies of its members. The new move must have been seen to have political advantages.

The action would scarcely have been taken except in response to a popular demand. It was pointed out in our last letter how large a section of the population still remains attached to Christianity and how effective has been the resistance offered to the activities of militant atheism. "The most remarkable feature of Russian development (and before it too, to some extent)," writes a friend who has been in Russia during the war and is in close touch with what is taking place, "is the rediscovery and glorification of her own great past. The Church played a large part in that tradition and its roots go deep in Russia." The Government may well feel that the Church has proved its loyalty and that the time has come to remove barriers which separate the rulers from large sections of population.

It may be also that the desire to conciliate opinion in Anglo-Saxon countries and to remove obstacles to closer collaboration between the Allies has had considerable influence.

Another powerful factor, as is suggested in an article in the *Tablet* of September 18th by Sir Paul Dukes, may have been the bearing of the change on the relations between Russia and the other Slav peoples. "Since Russia became a belligerent," he writes, "several meetings have been held in Moscow of bodies representing a Pan-Slav movement. As no meetings can be held without official approval, such gatherings must be regarded as official, concerned with furthering the ends of Soviet policy. The Pan-Slav movement before 1917 always had a religious as well as a racial background from which it drew its inspiration. Catholics and Orthodox worked together before the Revolution to promote it. Indeed, it is only through the close collaboration of the two Churches that the Pan-Slav idea can ever be realized."

The same article emphasizes what I said a fortnight ago about the significance of the strain of Messianism which is traditional in Russia.

"We should do well to recognize that the radical changes which Russian communist ideology has undergone, and its transformation into a fiery national patriotism, have narrowed the gulf separating the messianic spirit of Communism from the messianic spirit of the Orthodox Church. The tradition of 'Holy Russia' with an inspired mission toward mankind is ancient and ingrained. Under the stress of some intense emotion such as that of the present moment the Orthodox conception of a messianic Russia might well merge with the Marxist conception of a messianic proletariat, effecting a fusion of ideas the consequences of which would be incalculable."

Sir Paul Dukes also makes the important point that historically the institutions of the Patriarchate and of the Holy Synod have been opposed to one another. The Patriarchate has stood for the independence of the Church, while the Holy Synod, convoked by a government official of ministerial rank, was an instrument of the efficient control of the Church by the State. The re-establishment of the Synod may indicate that the Soviet Government intends to exercise a direct and open control over the Orthodox Church. The Russian Church has in the past shown itself only too ready to fit into the pattern of an absolute State, and the dangers in the situation are obvious.

If the Archbishop of York is correctly reported as saying that full religious freedom now exists in Russia, he must have had in view primarily freedom of religious worship. That is an important freedom and it is excellent news that it has been granted in Russia. But it is very far from being full Christian freedom. Worship and the action to which it prompts cannot be separated. It is not enough to be free to say our prayers; we also want freedom to obey the will of God in our private and public acts. That is the crucial issue of freedom in modern totalitarian societies.

When we take a large view of history, it is apparent how necessary and vital it is that the exclusive claims of an all-embracing national state should be balanced by the existence and active functioning of a

universal society. For this reason we must heartily welcome and do everything in our power to further all efforts to strengthen the bonds between the Russian Church and other Christian Churches.

THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

In Germany we have seen for a number of years a Church in conflict with the political power over this very issue. It has been one of the main questions in the Church conflict in Germany. It has been raised again in a pastoral letter appointed to be read in the Churches of Germany at the end of August by the German cardinals, archbishops and bishops meeting at Fulda.

Kneeling at the tomb of St. Boniface, the apostle of Germany, venerated by Germans through twelve centuries, they recalled the vast debt of the German people to Christianity. "The Christian Faith and the commandments of God," the letter continues, "are alone the bedrock on which truth, right and justice, freedom and peace, authority and obedience, on which any right system of laws and happy society, any ordered form of community life, must be based and anchored. All authority must always rest on Christ, must derive its strength and its mandate from Him to whom God the Father has given all power and judgment, and before whom, as the Apostle said, all must kneel, in Heaven, on the earth, and under the earth. Return to the Lord thy God: this is the call to us again, in momentous earnestness, in our own terrible times, with their calamitous hatred, their abysmal misery and their fearful sins and trespasses. The call goes out to all who have forsaken the one, true and living God, Creator, Father and Judge of all men; to all who do not heed God nor any of the commandments of God; to all who seek to set up hatred instead of love, force instead of justice, expediency instead of morality, as the prime laws of humankind. The call goes out also to those who have fashioned for themselves a god according to their own wishes and ideas, or a special god manifested only in their own nation and race. It is to them that the Holy Father Pope Pius XI addressed warning words: 'None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national god, of a national religion; or could attempt to confine within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations, before whose immensity they are "as drops in a pail of water" ' (Isaiah xl. 15)."

A vigorous article on the Church in Germany, having in view mainly, though not exclusively, the activities of the Protestant Church, by the former American chaplain in Berlin, appeared in a recent issue of *Christianity and Crisis*.[1] A good deal of the information has already appeared in the Christian News-Letter (C.N-L. No. 181), but our members may be glad to have a summary of the main facts of the past two years as they are given in the article.

(1) Two separate attempts by Nazi extremists to dissolve the German Church have been defeated.

(2) The home mission work of the German Church has been saved from incorporation into the Nazi Welfare Agency.

[1] Annual subscription 8s. Orders should be sent to C.N-L. Office.

(3) The Evangelical Churches in the annexed territories of Alsace and Poland have been rescued from the acute danger of dissolution.

(4) Christian opinion has asserted itself successfully against the policy of euthanasia.

(5) There has been widespread activity in the field of evangelism.

(6) Much has been done for prisoners of war, especially for Russian prisoners, for whom the ministries of the Red Cross were not available.

(7) Christians in the occupying armies have given help in many ways to the Churches in the occupied territories. Resistance to the Nazi authorities in these territories would have been less successful without the assistance of the German Church and of individual German Christians.

(8) Active and effective steps have been taken to keep alive in the minds of Christians the idea of ecumenical Christianity.

The significance of these facts is seen most clearly in relation to the tasks after the war, when the Nazi regime will have been destroyed and the urgent question will be what is to take its place. In this situation it will be of no small consequence that important sections of the German people have remained loyal to the Christian conception of values on which Western civilization is founded, and have maintained and asserted this loyalty in many individual instances at the risk of imprisonment and death.

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

We ought to allow our minds to dwell much and often on the common bonds of faith and obligation which unite the members of the universal Church of Christ in its different branches. The disintegration of society after the war may exceed anything that our minds can picture. The hatreds which it has implanted will probably be fiercer than those which the last war left in its wake. Disruptive forces will be at work everywhere. The only hope for the future will lie in the counter-working of healing forces. The most powerful among these counter-forces will be those which do not spring merely from human volition but have deep roots in a common faith and common tradition.

The headquarters of the World Council of Churches at Geneva is rendering an invaluable service in the links which it continues to maintain, in the face of mounting difficulties, between the Churches on the Continent of Europe. During the past eighteen months visits have been made by its officers to nine different countries, and representatives of Churches in at least as many countries have visited the headquarters at Geneva.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Subscriptions—12s. 6d. ($3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d. (to No. 178, 4d.): reduction for quantities.

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER
Supplement to No. 192
OCTOBER 6TH, 1943

BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION

We have never had so large a correspondence on any subject as about the issues raised in the letter from Mr. Lionel Curtis published in Christian News-Letter No. 186. There have been more than a hundred letters, many of considerable length. Nearly two-thirds are from lay men or women.

Many letters express gratitude to the Christian News-Letter for allowing the issue to be raised in its pages. Several implore us to go on insisting that these questions be faced. A commander in the navy, for example, writes, that " what is involved is the whole question of the Church's official and apparent attitude to the growth in knowledge or progress towards truth, which for the health of the world should be occurring as the centuries pass—the question whether the Church is prepared to keep her own teachings constantly under review."

The purpose of this Supplement is to carry the discussion a stage further in the light of the correspondence. I began by trying to summarize the main points in the correspondence with illustrative quotations, but the draft proved to be rather a patchwork, and it seemed a better scheme to start by quoting almost the whole of one of the longer and most penetrating letters, and to group the rest of the material round it. The writer of the letter, who prefers to remain anonymous, is a layman who has a wide knowledge of public affairs and has wrestled long and deeply with the problems of ultimate belief.

THE GROUND OF DECISION

" What I would put to Mr. Curtis, is that he is asking us to accept a great revision of Christian doctrine ; and seems to promise us that, if we do, belief in Christianity will have been made much easier for the modern mind, multitudes of moderns will believe, and the power of Christ in the modern world will grow much greater. What reason have we to accept his offer ?

" He says that ' the educated world has now come to realize that such beliefs, even if they are true, could provide no basis whatever for the faith which our Lord was teaching to men.' But this is to fly right in the face of *all* the historic facts about Christianity. Read Dodd's little book on what the apostles actually taught, for instance. The whole of the miraculous spread of Christianity in its first two centuries as a Church was quite indubitably founded on faith in those things which Mr. Curtis tells us could be better omitted. Not only on those, of course, but those were vital to the faith. Nor were those articles of faith so much more readily believed in because of the then ' climate of opinion,' as Mr. Curtis may perhaps suppose. The ' educated opinion ' of those times was always trying to water down or alter the historic part of the teaching, and instead to turn the faith into some

kind of idealistic theosophy. You have only to read the early fathers against heresy to see that this was so.

"What evidence—not historical, for there can be none—but even psychological, can Mr. Curtis offer that we could 'popularize' the faith by taking out these elements which make it seem 'harder' to believe? I submit to him that he hasn't any. There always have been, of course, off-shoots of Christianity, in the form of sects which tried to adopt the ethical, aesthetic or philosophical content of the New Testament and leave out the 'scandal of historical particularity'; but such efforts soon lose what vitality they have and pass away.

"But I really doubt if Mr. Curtis is seriously offering this advice because he thinks the world would be better evangelized if the Gospel were, so to speak, 'bowdlerized' by a committee of D.Sc's. I think he really has a higher motive. What he is urging upon us is justified in his mind by the sacredness of truth. He is convinced that the laws of nature, as known to us in this scientific age, prohibit our belief in miracles. We just can *not* really and truly believe them, we must be deceiving ourselves or others if we say we do, and *satya na paramo dharma*—there's no religion higher than the truth.

"That's all right; but then we don't know the truth. We live in an age when it is, one may admit, almost compulsory upon our minds to believe that everything is *systematic*. That isn't to say that we really understand the nature of things. Psychologically it only means that we are in a more materialistic phase of culture. Nevertheless, we don't know, we live by faith, and if we are going to be truthful about it, we must admit we do.

"To accept Mr. Curtis's suggestion would be to effect a tremendous change in religious doctrine—not only a negative one. We should be saying—the miraculous element in Christian doctrine is given up, it is no longer true. But this would imply some positive tenet of *more* than corresponding weight. You can't disprove something with nothing. If you have discovered *a priori* that the resurrection was not a real event in time, you must have discovered something else *a priori* which has greater universal validity, and disproves it. Well, what *have* you discovered?

"I should like Mr. Curtis to tell us this. I guess that what he means is that the success of the inductive method of science has so impressed us that we really do in effect believe in the impossibility of 'miracles.' And this means that the contemporary scientific account of things-in-general has the authority of an *a priori* judgment of the mind.

"I am probably doing some injustice here to Mr. Curtis's own thought, but not—I think he must agree—to the *effect* which the revision he proposes would have. Its effect on the common mind of modern civilization would be to apotheosize 'science' as the truth according to which even Christian revelation must be revised and edited.

"Then science and planning would indeed become—as our friend Eliot once called them—'the big ju-ju.' This has, of course, a bearing upon Mr. Curtis's reason for making his proposal to the theologians: for it was, I understand, born of his need and desire for a *foundation* for civilization. He felt that this must be a religious foundation, and

that the only possible religion would be the Christian religion. But look! If his advice was taken, we should have slipped another foundation under the Christian one—the foundation of science, which would, of course, to many people seem much more appropriate for a modern state. I can't think that is quite what Mr. Curtis hopes for. Or does he ?

" If we take the politico-social structures as primary, and seek for a religion to give them vitality and validity, we shall—however little we intend it—be only seeking for an ' ideology ' to justify the maintenance of existing or proposed power-structures. And in that case, of course, we *shall* find it very important to make ' science ' and not religion the judge of what religion really is. Then we can apotheosize science to our heart's content ; and science means everything, from microscopes to *chars d'assaut*, that is an instrument of power. But in that way Mr. Curtis would never attain his goal. He would only get a rigid totalitarian tyranny, sweetened (at best) with a little religious sentiment where such a thing seemed unlikely to interfere with the works."

This letter puts very forcibly the question which lies at the root of the discussion. The initial error which we have to avoid, and to which we are all prone because of our subjection to the intellectual climate of our time, is to take for granted the view of the universe built up by the secular mind, which has left Christianity out of account, and to make it the criterion by which we judge Christianity. That is to say, we assume a certain framework and then ask whether Christianity fits into it or not. But that is to beg the question at the start. Christianity claims to be *revelation*, i.e. to tell us something we could not otherwise know, and as a result to give us an understanding of the universe quite different from one reached apart from it.

HOW IMPORTANT IS HISTORY ?

The main questions which emerge in the correspondence are all in one way or another different aspects of the fundamental question. For example, there is great diversity of view about the importance of history for our knowledge of ultimate reality. If we are committed in advance to a philosophy which holds that what happens in history can make no *real* difference to our knowledge of reality, we have already ruled out of court the Christian assertion that the meaning of the universe is disclosed to us in certain unique events in history. We have, in the words of the letter already quoted, " slipped another foundation," namely our philosophy, " under the Christian one." We see, therefore, how essential it is that these conscious or unconscious philosophical presuppositions should be dragged into the open.

The view that history does not really matter, since it does not affect eternity in any way, is the Greek view. It is pre-Christian, but through the influence of the great Greek thinkers it still exercises a powerful hold over the western mind. Some of our correspondents assert it in an extreme form. " A faith which claims to be spiritual," one of them writes, " is false to its very nature if it stakes its authenticity on sense and sight. If it claims to be absolute and universal it cannot be based on evidence, sensory or visual." And another writes

that "the truth of anything, surely, including the teaching of the Church about God, i.e. that He is the Father of all men, is inherent in itself and cannot be affected by any evidence."

But this attempt to detach our knowledge of the spiritual from the world which we apprehend by the senses is fallacious. How could we know anything about fatherhood at all unless we had "sensory and visual" experience of an earthly father?

I had reached this point in revising the Supplement when a letter came into my hands from one of our members in the United States emphasizing the importance of this issue. He urged that since all words had at one time a physical reference, *all* moral and metaphysical discussion is radically metaphorical, and that consequently whatever proof can be offered of the ultimate verities can be given *only* by analogy with the world of phenomena. In this respect the position of those who hold to a belief in God apart from the events which constitute the Christian revelation is not, in fact, any easier than that of those for whom the knowledge of God is given in those events.

But leaving aside attempts to ease the tension by getting rid altogether of one side of the antithesis between the eternal truths of reason and the particular events of history, there still remains a cleavage of opinion among our correspondents on the subject of the relation between the eternal verities and history.

Dr. Clement C. J. Webb, for example, who certainly attaches importance to the historical element in religion, as is evident from his little book on the subject,[1] says in a letter that "we may be truly thankful that Lessing and the great German thinkers who followed him—and the 'British Idealists' whom they inspired, and who taught the generation of Oxford men to which both Curtis and I may be said to belong—insisted that 'eternal truths of reason' cannot depend for their validity on the evidence of particular historical facts. But despite my gratitude to the idealists whom he follows, I do *not* agree with Lionel Curtis in holding that Christianity can dispense with the faith that Christ is 'risen' in a sense in which we cannot use the same language of Lawrence or Lothian or any other man in whose extinction by death we may find it impossible to believe?"

Others who have written, on the other hand, go much further in breaking with the idealist view. Professor John Macmurray, for example, writes: "The idealism embodied in the Lessing quotation seems to me the most serious disease of contemporary spirituality. I cannot think of Christianity as a set of moral principles to be applied to the conditions of social and individual life. Christianity is a continuing action in human history, determining the direction of human development, and this is of its essence." Another correspondent says of the Lessing dictum that "it rests upon that complete severance of the 'real' and the 'ideal' which has been, upon the whole, the greatest curse of German thinking." And a third, belonging to the younger generation, remarks that "one spice of Marxism would be enough to alter the whole *flavour* of this discussion of the real and ideal—the Lessing-Curtis dogma would be simply unintelligible to a Marxist."

[1] *The Historical Element in Religion*, Allen and Unwin. 4s. 6d.

This question of the importance of history is, as Professor O. C. Quick writes, "the *whole point at issue* between Christianity and Hellenism. Now, if history does not really matter, *neither can politics*. That seems to me the simplest refutation of the whole argument, and *at this point*, clearly I should agree with the Marxist against Curtis. The latter, if he were to carry out his Platonism logically, would make Christianity an *other-worldly* religion, i.e. the religion of eternal verities unaffected by what happens in space and time. The Marxists make Christianity (in so far as they believe in it) a *this-worldly* religion, i.e. a means of establishing a classless society in space and time. But the truth, according to the New Testament, is that Christianity is a *new-worldly* religion—a religion of a new creation. And we need a whole new philosophy to determine and explain what that means."

This statement of Professor Quick's puts the issue very clearly. Is a pre-determined philosophy to fix the framework into which Christianity must be fitted, or do the events to which the Church bears witness disclose new aspects of reality which must determine and colour our whole understanding of the meaning of the universe and of human life?

WHO WAS CHRIST?

The same fundamental question is involved in another difference that emerges in the correspondence. It is a profound difference in regard to who Jesus was and what He came to do. If we start with the assumption of secular humanism that man is capable in himself of working out his own salvation and building a satisfactory world, it is natural to think of Christ as essentially a great moral teacher, whose concern it was primarily, and in the last resort exclusively, to enunciate principles of conduct. That this view is widespread is asserted by a representative of the younger generation, who has recently been in touch with a number of groups interested in reconstruction and reports that "the most common idea is that Christianity is an ethic, not a Gospel, and that Jesus was a perfect man, a great prophet and nothing more." This attitude is partly the result of the fact that, as a young layman in the civil service writes, "a large proportion of ordinary lay Christians still think in theologically liberal-modernist terms, because they have never been taught anything else. They have never had orthodox doctrine put in a way which 'came alive.' The cause of this 'liberalism' is not the pressure of their practical experience so much as what they have been told. On the other hand, there are many of the younger generation who have been driven from 'modernism' to substantial orthodoxy primarily because of the failure of the modernist approach to get a grip on social life as we found it."

The alternative view is that Christ was the unique manifestation in history of a divine salvation and power that has done for man what he is incapable of doing for himself. The coming of Christ has raised the life of men to a new level and, as the calendar bears witness, initiated a new era in the life of mankind. As Miss Violet Markham writes, "there is necessarily a gulf between those of us who believe that the Incarnation was an historical fact—a happening in the cosmos willed by

God at a given moment in time, which has radically altered the content of the cosmos—and the opposite view, that Jesus was a supremely good man, better in degree, but not in kind from the normal run of humanity."

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

It appears to be felt by some of those who have written that it is intellectually less difficult to believe in the Greek view of the immortality of the soul than in the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body. But in actual fact, it is just as difficult to conceive of individuality persisting as pure spirit as to picture the resurrection of the body. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr has dealt with this question in the second volume of his Gifford Lectures,[1] published this year. He says :—

"The idea of the resurrection of the body is a Biblical symbol in which modern minds take the greatest offence and which has long since been displaced in most modern versions of the Christian faith by the idea of the immortality of the soul. The latter idea is regarded as a more plausible expression of the hope of everlasting life. It is true, of course, that the idea of the resurrection transcends the limits of the conceivable ; but it is not always appreciated that this is equally true of the idea of an immortal soul. Either idea, as every other idea which points to the consummation beyond history, is beyond logical conception. The hope of the resurrection nevertheless embodies the very genius of the Christian idea of the historical. It implies that eternity will fulfil and not annul the richness and variety which temporal process has elaborated."

EFFECTIVE BELIEF

It is possible, however, to recognize that there are no compelling scientific or historical reasons for denying the resurrection of Christ, and yet to find oneself unable to give whole-hearted assent to that belief. That is where for Professor John Macmurray the real difficulty lies. "It is not possible for me," he writes, "nor for many of my contemporaries, to believe *effectively* that Jesus arose from the dead in the flesh. I am well aware that this is no good ground for denying that He did, especially as I realize that the inability is not based on evidence, but is the result of the climate of thought in which I live. But the conclusion I draw is that I must not assert the resurrection as a basis of my faith. The peril of publicly assenting to what one cannot believe effectively and practically seems to me very great. One of the major suspicions that people have of the Church is that Christians are too ready to say that they believe things which they do not effectively believe."

In this statement Professor Macmurray brings to the surface a difficulty acutely felt by many Christian minds. His concern about the effectiveness of belief is the expression of a Christian scrupulousness in regard to truth which is to be preferred to any amount of half-believed orthodoxy. It is plain from the rest of his letter that what he is reacting against is the identification of Christian faith with an assent to intellectual propositions. He rejects the idea that "faith is an alternate source of theoretical truth." In this he is quite right. An

[1] *The Nature and Destiny of Man.* Vol. II, *Human Destiny.* Nisbet. 15s.

intellectual judgment that there is sufficient evidence for this or that occurrence in the past to warrant the conclusion that it actually happened need have nothing to do with religious decision. It has been one of the fundamental mistakes of orthodoxy to insist, or to give the impression, that it has.

In what sense, then, may belief in the resurrection of Christ become effective, practical belief? It must be emphasized again that the belief cannot be isolated from belief in the person and work of Christ taken as a whole. When we find ourselves confronted with Christ, and with God who meets us in Him, we pass altogether out of the sphere of the merely intellectual. We are faced with the necessity of a fundamental act of decision. What is at stake has been put by Professor H. H. Farmer better than I can hope to state it, and I will, therefore, quote what he says.

"It is the Christian conviction," he writes in his book *Towards Belief in God*,[1] "that there has been one event in human history which, though it happened at a particular point in space and time, is, in a very real sense, *every* man's event, *every* man's crisis and decision. This is the event of Christ. The critical question which, sooner or later, in one form or another, God asks of every man is, 'What think ye of Christ?' . . .

"There is, moreover, one event within, so to say, the larger and more inclusive event of Christ, in which God's question to a man concentrates and focuses itself in a peculiarly and finally challenging way. This event is the crucifixion. The crucifixion of Christ continually confronts us with something in the nature of a final choice and decision —literally a *crucial* choice and decision. It does this because it is the crucifixion of Christ; because, that is to say, it is the crucifixion of the one person in history of whom we have reason to think that His whole being was centred in, and controlled by, the conviction that God really is, what in these pages we have maintained Him to be, namely an austere and wholly trustworthy personal purpose of love. In Christ is to be seen the spirit of perfect love, resting on and sustained by the conviction that God is love, thrust right into the midst of human life. . . .

"The crucifixion of Jesus confronts the soul of man with a searching dilemma, with the necessity of finally making up his mind. For it means one of two things. Either it means that that sort of believing about God, that sort of living, even when it is at its maximal point of purity and devotion, is so fantastically false, so utterly wide of the truth, that it cannot stand up to the forces which actually dominate the world, but is doomed to be stamped out by them—which is exactly what powerful leaders and teachers in the world to-day are saying. Or, on the other hand, it means that it is so true, so firmly rooted in fact, that it can afford to accept seemingly utter defeat, knowing that the victory, God's victory, is in the end with it. One of two things: the crucifixion of Jesus is either a great, grim, derisive shout of *No* to the proposition that God is love, gathering into itself and summing up all those other evil things in human life which seem also to shout

[1] Student Christian Movement Press. 8s. 6d.

no to it; or it is a firm, steady, undefeated *Yes* penetrating, persisting through, all these other things."

It is in relation to the situation here vividly portrayed that the religious meaning of belief in the resurrection of Christ becomes apparent. Can we be really satisfied to believe that the crucifixion was the last and decisive word in that marvellous, world-transforming story? Do we accept with sad resignation the bitter knowledge that

"Now He is dead! For hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down"?

There is one historical certainty, at least, that is established beyond all doubt or question—that it was only because the first disciples had what they felt to be good ground for believing that the crucifixion was *not* the final word, that the Christian Church came into existence and that all the effects followed which under its influence have given shape to our Western world. If we really believe that *God* is love—and on that belief everything turns—is it actually so difficult to believe that the whole of our natural existence is subject to the control of Spirit and that the life in which that love was completely manifested had power to triumph over death? Belief in the resurrection of Christ is the assertion that the sovereignty of God and the supremacy of spirit have been vindicated in the natural creation and are not simply truths relating to an ideal world.

But to see that belief in the resurrection, so far as it has religious significance, is not a judgment in the theoretic sphere but a response to the disclosure of the reality which confronts us in Christ, does not set us free from dependence on historic fact. If it could be *proved* that Christ did not rise again, we should be left with the gloom of the crucifixion and the decisive triumph of evil over good. To dare to believe that God is love, and that His love can triumph over sin and circumstance and death, would be far harder. Baron von Hügel was surely right in insisting that we have as Christians to hold firmly, on the one hand, that a nucleus of factual, historical happenings is essential and indispensable to Christianity *and* to recognize, on the other hand, that the precise nature of these happenings is a matter for free historical enquiry and criticism, so that our understanding and interpretation of what happened may change with the advance of knowledge.

I agree whole-heartedly with Professor Macmurray that the vindication of the faith of the Church can be found only in action. The vital matter is not intellectual assent to an assertion about historic fact, but the response of our whole being to the God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—a response which enables us to confront without fear the forces that threaten human existence and to triumph over them. Only a faith of that quality can lead to the victory that overcomes the world.

J. H. O.

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Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.